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Values orientation approach to the educational process: The temporal dimension

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Abstract

Substantial changes in the Latvian education system have meant a shift from the traditional to the humanistic paradigm. This fundamental transformation notwithstanding, the learner's experience still tends to be undervalued, hence the need to re-examine the value placed on an individual learner in the context of sustainable development. The present article aims to reflect on university students' views about their core life values from a temporal perspective. This qualitative study draws on content analysis of fifty-six essays on the perception of family by bachelor programme students in a regional university of Latvia. Insights from these data are supported by findings from focus group interviews with full-time students taking the courses "Family Pedagogy" and "Social Pedagogy" (N=111). The conclusions highlight the importance of evaluating each learner's knowledge, skills and experience which transforms into self-experience and ultimately enables individuals to set more sustainable aims for their own learning.

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1. Theoretical background

The modern-day reality demands flexibility and ability to adjust to the requirements dictated by the market society. It is also essential to understand oneself and to evaluate one's experience in order to become a successful professional. The educational process and its organization at university are always a challenge. Graduates ultimately become key players in the labor market. At tertiary level, the educational process ought to cater for and

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enhance each learner's abilities, wishes and values. There is an urgent need to re-evaluate the educational process at universities and allow more space for each learner to appraise his or her own unique experience and values. In this regard, Vedin (2011) advocates a challenging subject matter as both didactically and psychologically expedient.

In addition, Vedin (2011) points to a significance of the individualization process at university, that is, the individualization of the educational process to take into account the needs of each learner. Thus, individualization emerges as a way of organizing the teaching and learning process that caters for learners' individual differences in terms of perception, cognitive and mnemonic preferences and character. Moreover, since change is ubiquitous in the modern world, university studies should engage learners in its evaluation in a sense of seeking value and determining the orientation of the latter.

Rohweder and Virtanen's (2009) model of learning for sustainable development confirms the critical importance of shaping the educational process at university in a sustainable way. In this regard, Rohweder and Virtanen (2009) emphasize three factors: context, mental aspects and activities as well as underscore re-evaluation of values in terms of temporality as fundamental for sustainability.

Comparison of traditional and humanistic approaches allows for evaluating current changes in education. We are witnessing a shift from subordination to interrelatedness, from monologue to dialogue, from coercion to co-existence in interrelatedness, from control to freedom of choice (Vedins, 2011). A key element of the teaching and learning process is learners' experience which can be interpreted as an amalgamation of knowledge, skills and attitudes derived from personal habit, social convention and national tradition that is being passed from generation to generation (Šteinberga, 2011). Yet, what matters most is self-experience – the knowledge, skills and attitudes that an individual acquires throughout his or her lifetime and appraises and internalizes as personally significant values. Questioning is an indicator which suggests that experience is transforming into self-experience (Šteinberga, 2011).

The above-outlined discussion boils down to a conclusion: the teaching and learning process at university should be evaluative in a sense of accepting the learner as a benchmark and nurturing his or her ability to envision and evaluate sustainable futures.

2. Consistency of values across generations

Transmission of values from one generation to another involves young people's willing acceptance of certain values as personally significant. Voluntarily accepted and internalized values allow for self-regulation of the young. Transmission of family values should be seen as a two-way process: firstly, the child's perception of his or her parent's values and, secondly, acceptance, or rejection thereof (Knafo & Schwartz, 2009). Intrinsic motivation to accept parental values is no longer perceived as a threat to young people's autonomy. Soenens and colleagues (2007) emphasize that parents who support their children's perspective, provide more choice options and freedom and allow their offsprings to act upon their personal values can establish more sincere relations in the family.

In 2013, having received a commission from the Ministry of Education and Science, Excolo Latvia Ltd. conducted a study about the possibilities, abilities and attitudes of youth. The said research reveals that youth consider as significant such values as family and career. In a future perspective, they place major importance on balancing the values of work and family, because youth expectations in both spheres are very high (IZM, 2013). Curiously enough, marital life is not mentioned as a significant value; rather, the research participants tend to prioritize informal partnership (IZM, 2013). In the long run, the findings from this study might contribute to the debate about the growth of non-registered families (IZM, 2013).

The present study explores the content of values in the temporal context. In terms of philosophical underpinnings, it draws on psychoanalytical humanism and rests on an assumption that love is among the most significant family values to be considered. Love includes basic elements such as care, responsibility, respect and knowledge (Fromms, 2009). Hence, the teaching and learning process at university should give students

opportunities to analyze different problem situations, determine the values that underpin them and appraise these values in terms of orientation and temporality, keeping in mind that love is the supreme value and the very essence of humaneness.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Socio-demographic information about the respondents

The total of one hundred and eleven (N=111) second- and third-year Bachelor program students took part in this study, including 42 males and 69 females. The participants' age ranges from 21 to 25. As an assignment in the study course "Social pedagogy," the students were asked to write an essay about family values. Afterwards, they were encouraged to pinpoint key family values and appraise them in terms of temporality (past, present and future). Finally, the students were invited to participate in a focus group interview which enabled them to re-examine the content and orientation of their values.

The research was conducted in 2012/2013.

The participants were questioned for personal details such as gender, age, education, professional occupation and family characteristics. They were then invited to write down and rank ten most significant values that dominate their values systems and ten values that they would want to take as cornerstones for building their own families. During subsequent focus group interviews the research participants were encouraged to share their opinion and discuss how they internalize family values as well as which they consider as the most significant values for building their own families and bringing up their own children. The ultimate purpose was to identify consistencies in the transmission of family values.

Thus, the emphases of this study were, first, how Bachelor students formulate the values systems that they live by at present and, secondly, which values they consider as most significant underpinnings for their family life in the future. The focus is on how the values of their parents affect the students' moral development and which values prevail over time.

3.2. Research methods

The study aims to explore how university students view family values and which are the most essential values that prevail over time. The study rests on the following research methods: essay, survey and focus group interviews.

Essay may be defined as a relatively brief piece of creative writing that allows the author to express his or her views and demonstrate a subjective attitude towards an issue of concern. The students were asked to write down their opinions about the values they believe to have inherited from their families. Subsequent analysis of the essays was focused on uncovering the core values which the students have inherited from their families and to pinpoint the values which the students want to build their own families around.

Survey. The students were asked to write down ten basic values on a time line: past, present and future. This allowed for identifying recurrent values and establishing whether the students consider those as important.

Focus group interview. This article draws on data from six focus group interviews about the values that students consider sustainable. The students were interviewed in six groups with average interview duration of one and a half hours. The findings from the focus group interviews are expressed in thesis statements.

3.3. Limitations of the study

The sample size and nature preclude abstract generalization. Making more definitive conclusions warrants extensive further research, such as longitudinal studies or in-depth interviews to gain a more profound

understanding of the values transmission processes in the families of young people from self-reported data. In addition, subsequent investigations could not only rely on self-reported data but also make use of some graphic research instruments.

4. Research findings

The data suggest that the students, family experience notwithstanding, name only positive values, such as ability to admire and be proud, ability to find joy in one's life, ability to keep secrets and ability to be diligent. Analysis of the 2553 values named by the students allowed for grouping them in several categories, thereby reducing the number of values to 251. The analysis of values in terms of temporality reveals 89 values inherited from parents, 94 values describing current family values and 68 future-oriented values. The analysis of the content of values points to the social, cultural and environmental aspects of the latter. The economic aspect was not mentioned in self-reported data gained from the students.

According to Schwartz (1992), the more imbedded an individual's set of values is, the least likely he/she is to experience a conflict between opposing values; the more unstable one's value system, the more possibility for a clash of values.

Key findings from essay and survey data, summarized in Tables 1 and 2, suggest that the students highlight such values as support, diligence, kindness, faith, gratitude, listening, independence and love of work. All these values appear in the contexts of past and present but are conspicuously absent from the research participants' visions of the future. It may be that they are taken for granted, seen as givens in the present but with no relevance to the future. It appears that these values are perceived by the students as meaningful only for appraisals of the present and past experiences.

Another curious tendency in the data pool concerns the values for the future (Table 2), such as culture of work, autonomy, flexibility, future-oriented vision and real rather than virtual society. These values appear to lack the dimensions of past and present. The data evoke reflection about the students' visions of the future and its inherent challenges. For instance, culture of work and flexibility are also acknowledged as values for the present. This may stem from the specifics of the students' perception of time – for them the future does not begin tomorrow but at a more distant point of graduation or taking the first steps in one's profession.

Table 1. Temporality of values: The past and the present

	Values of the past and present	Values of the future
Personal/Cultural aspect	Support, diligence, kindness, hope	x – not mentioned
Social aspect	Sharing with others, ability to listen	
Environmental aspect	Independence, love of work	

The data suggest a number of values that appear relevant only with regards to the future.

Table 2. Temporality of values: The future

	Values of the future	Values of the past and present
Personal/Cultural aspect	Respect of the individual. Culture of work. Freedom of	x – not mentioned

	action.
	Independence
Social aspect	Flexibility. Future-oriented thinking.
	Courage
Environmental aspect	Real society

Analysis of the content of values in the temporal perspective suggests there are two distinct values in the survey data, namely, respect of a human being and patriotism. These values are mentioned as existent in the past and as desirable in the future, though not referred to in descriptions of the present state of affairs. This tendency warrants a more profound exploration than was possible during focus group interviews.

Allusions to sustainability imply it is a dominant value in the students' values orientations. In their questionnaires, the students report such values as love, respect, responsibility and health, which, essentially, can be considered fundamental values. These values can be seen as universal and eternal. Through socialization in their families, the students have developed their own attitudes and systems of values. Nevertheless, one cannot disclaim the influence of education on the students' deeper understanding of intergenerational connectedness and responsibility.

Analysis of focus group data confirms the enormity of the parents' role in preserving and transmitting values to their children. Therefore, it is essential that children have both parents, even if their marital status is not formally settled.

Parents are responsible for preservation of certain norms and values. Due to the generation gap, teacher values may differ from those of their learners. Values that are relevant only to the past and present are not reflected in the students' visions of the future, which means that the future is quite vague and can be seen as posing a new challenge.

For the students, sustainable values include flexibility, profound understanding of culture, and hope that the future holds possibilities for real rather than virtual communication.

The students desire to be respected, although, conflictingly enough, they acknowledge having trouble with openness to diversity.

The students wish to see their children as patriots even though they are not positive that they should remain in this country in the long run. In most cases, financial and material factors are being considered as domineering.

5. Conclusion

A proper family is able to create a safe, positive and supportive environment for all its members to develop their potential. Sustainable families can be maintained by reinforcing intergenerational connectedness in value transmission. Healthy and sustainable families transmit to the young generation accepted values, attitudes, behavioral patterns and expectations about parenting, relationships and decision making.

Strong families maintain intergenerational connectedness and support networks. A sustainable family is a critical national resource. Families should offer a safe place where young people could feel comfortable and secure, and find support for facing the challenges of the day.

The study suggests some evidence that internalized family values of young people are not necessarily identical to their parents' personal values. Intergenerational differences between perceived family values and young people's personal values are identified in two aspects: openness to change or modernity (readiness to take risks, gain new experiences and face change) and conservation (tradition, security, order).

In order to transmit values, parents need to build a caring family environment where young people's autonomy is respected. Universities need to educate the young about how to attribute value and choose among alternatives as well as how to translate knowledge and skills into practice.

Thus, the study process at university should engage learners in re-evaluation of values and exploration of their orientation in terms of temporality, because the pursuit of sustainability is not limited to aspiring for personal aims; it also subsumes preservation and transmission of what is socially accepted as valuable to the next generation.

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